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SUBJECT: DARFUR: MORNEI, WEST DARFUR - THE EYE OF THE STORM?

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SUMMARY

¶1. (U) On March 5 and 6, USAID staff traveled to Mornei, West Darfur, to monitor USAID-funded humanitarian programs and to assess current conditions. This represented the first visit by USAID Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance staff to Mornei in more than sixteen months due to restricted access as a result of ongoing insecurity. Despite access difficulties in surrounding areas, USAID staff reported stable conditions in Mornei town and internally displaced person (IDP) camp where USAID programs provide essential services to an estimated 80,000 people. However, the recent introduction of new Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) personnel, Sudanese government-funded local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and nomadic Arab settlements in the area have the potential to undermine traditional authority, create conflict among the various camp ethnic groups, and disrupt humanitarian programming. End summary.

BACKGROUND

¶2. (U) In 2003, before the Darfur conflict began, Mornei had an estimated population of 7,000. However, by the end of 2004, the town and surrounding area's population had swelled to an estimated 75,000 individuals, including 68,000 IDPs from 170 villages in the Zalingei, El Geneina, and Wadi Salih localities. IDPs included members of Fur, Maasalit, Zaghawa, Tama, Gimir, Dagou, and Tawara ethnic groups. Although other areas in West Darfur have experienced frequent program suspensions due to insecurity, humanitarian agencies in Mornei have been able to maintain a consistent presence. Through implementing partners Concern, Save the Children/US, ACTED, and the U.N. World Food Program (WFP), USAID supports ongoing health, livelihoods, emergency food assistance, and water, sanitation, and hygiene programs in the area. USAID staff noted the high quality of partner operations that provide health care to approximately 200 people daily, access to clean water for the general population, livelihood opportunities for 2,437 individuals, and monthly food rations to 73,539 people.

NEW ACTORS MAKE WAVES IN MORNEI

13. (U) In November 2006, new HAC personnel and Sudanese government-funded NGOs arrived in Mornei, leading to increased tensions and strained relations among government officials, the humanitarian community, and IDPs. The arrival of three new HAC officials from Khartoum has increased tensions between humanitarian agencies and the HAC in Mornei, as well as within the local HAC administration. The Mornei HAC Commissioner, Mohammed Abbas, is currently engaged in a political struggle with the new officials, who are not as cooperative or supportive of international humanitarian organizations and IDPs. At the same time, Sudanese government-funded local NGOs established a presence in Mornei. IDPs refused to accept non-WFP food assistance from the local NGO the Islamic African Relief Agency (IARA), which attempted to initiate food distributions. IARA then established a health center adjacent to a Mdecins Sans Frontihres (MSF)-operated health clinic, and is competing with MSF for beneficiaries. Traditional leaders, who had been supportive of international NGO engagement in the camp, have subsequently had their influence steadily eroded.

LOCATION AND LAND CONCERNS

14. (U) For reasons that remain unclear, the week of February 20, local authorities attempted to force IDPs to purchase the land they were occupying at a price of USD 50 per plot. (Note: Similar attempts to charge IDPs for land were made in El Geneina and Habilah during the same period. However, after pressure from the U.N., these initiatives were stopped by the HAC in El Geneina. End note.)

HAC plans to extend the camp to the east and relocate IDPs from crowded areas around roads in town to less congested areas further away. However, IDPs view this initiative as an attempt at forced relocation and are not cooperating with HAC. Traditional leaders perceive the relocation as an attempt to weaken their authority by separating their villages into multiple parts distributed around the camp. U.N. agencies fear that the mixing of people from various ethnic groups could result in conflict. (Note: In June 2006, a WFP

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registration intended to improve beneficiary targeting prompted ethnic clashes resulting in three deaths. Due to the violence, no subsequent registration attempts have taken place. End note.)

SECURITY

15. (U) HAC has negotiated a security agreement with several Arab nomad groups in the Mornei vicinity who have established 17 checkpoints around the settlement to provide security to IDPs. Beyond this cordon IDP security is not ensured. Several of the nomadic groups providing security occupy villages destroyed and abandoned earlier in the conflict; however, the scale of land occupation is not clear. Although USAID staff observed several women returning to town from gathering grass and wood, humanitarian agencies reported that insecurity prevented vehicular travel outside of Mornei town. The African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) in the area has a positive relationship with IDPs and humanitarian agencies, and maintains one civilian police (CIVPOL) station in town. However, AMIS/CIVPOL will not patrol outside the station without an AMIS protection force.

COMMENT

16. (U) Humanitarian access in West Darfur is witnessing a limited recovery compared to the situation in December 2006 when humanitarian agencies had drawn down due to insecurity. USAID-funded NGOs have been successful in stabilizing conditions for IDPs by meeting their basic needs for water, health, hygiene, and food. However, since November 2006, U.N. and NGO agencies have observed efforts to restrict IDPs to camps, break up traditional leadership structures, divide displaced groups, settle Arab nomadic groups on displaced African land, and provide an alternative source

of humanitarian assistance accountable to the government. Donor-funded humanitarian programs provide essential humanitarian services to IDPs and local populations. Changes in the HAC's attitude towards both IDPs and humanitarian agencies should be monitored in Mornei and across Darfur over the coming months to ensure continuation of an effective and non-politicized humanitarian response. End comment.

HUME